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Theodore Roosevelt
The voice of America

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ADDRESS *of* JAMES B. DIGGS

Delivered January 12, 1919, at

ROOSEVELT MEMORIAL SERVICES

TULSA, OKLAHOMA

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Theodore Roosevelt: The Voice of America.

ADDRESS OF JAMES B. DIGGS, DELIVERED
JANUARY TWELVE, NINETEEN HUNDRED
AND NINETEEN, AT ROOSEVELT MEMORIAL
EXERCISES, TULSA, OKLAHOMA : : :

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:—

In the silent watches of the night, calmly as the flowers fold their petals at set of sun, peacefully as a child at slumber on its mother's breast, the greatest American, the greatest man of the English speaking races, you and I have known, one of the greatest that all the ages that have winged their flight and the ages yet to come, have known or will ever know, THEODORE ROOSEVELT, put off mortality, put on immortality and by that mysterious natural process men misname death, passed from time into eternity to receive the victor's crown promised to the just and faithful servant.

It is in consequence of this great affliction, this sore bereavement, that we are gathered with bowed heads and hushed hearts to commemorate the life and deeds of our beloved and illustrious dead. Dead, did I say? No, not dead, for he is of the few, the immortal ones that

are not born to die, but to live forever in the heart and in the history of man.

Time does not permit, a due regard for your patience forbids, that I should recount the many deeds by which this rarely gifted man won his way into the hearts and claimed the confidence of his people. As soldier, statesman, historian, man of letters and patriot, he has written his name in the splendid achievements that adorn and ennable American history, and has himself become a part of that history. These deeds are yet fresh in your memory and I can only allude to, not dwell, upon them.

This many-sided man presents so many qualities, each quality in itself so beautiful and so true and so entitled to demand regard and receive consideration, that I must leave the duty of portrayal and delineation to the historian and be content to deal only with a few of the qualities that make him the only American since the immortal WASHINGTON of whom it can with truth be said that he is "first in the hearts of his countrymen."

Other great Americans, it is true, have lived, fulfilled their parts and passed away, but none of them have so permeated all life, so riveted the attention of all mankind, so deeply touched the national conscience, so smote the national heart and caused its holiest waters to flow. Of such great Americans ANDREW JACKSON and HENRY CLAY more nearly approach him in the qualities of leadership, in the qualities that fascinate the imagination and enthrall the soul of man, but neither was a prototype—a promise of the ROOSEVELT that was yet to come.

ANDREW JACKSON, in the full glory of a great military victory and by adroit appeals to the passions and

prejudices of certain classes, climbed to the Presidency and became the idol of a great political party. HENRY CLAY, by the witchery of an eloquence unsurpassed in his day and by the force of a dominating personality, became the dictator of another great political party, and made his word its law, but each of these appealed only to a party or a section, and each, dying, left behind personal and political enmities that impress their bitterness on the history and leave their traces in the literature of today.

ROOSEVELT, unlike JACKSON, had not the glamour of a great military victory, achieved over a then hereditary enemy, to be the open sesame to the hearts of his countrymen; unlike CLAY, he had not the gift of overmastering eloquence to subdue the mind, enchant and enchain the judgment of his compeers; unlike each of these illustrious Americans, his appeal was not addressed to a party nor to a section, and his death leaves no personal enmities, no political rancor, no sectional hate or prejudice, but in doing him honor, North, East, West and South join in generous rivalry; to attest his worth Jew and Gentile, Christian and Pagan, Protestant and Catholic, Democrat and Republican unite in noble emulation; to do him reverence, king and peasant, potentate and toiler, join in tribute to his memory. JACKSON and CLAY became the great leaders of rival parties, the apostles of rival political creeds, ROOSEVELT without rivalry the apostle of mankind, the voice of truth, the tribune of all the people, the acknowledged spokesman of America.

One source of the spell of his mastery over the minds and hearts of men, one secret of his hold on the affections and his command of the confidence of mankind, lies in

the fact that in all the relations of life as son, husband, father and citizen, he was what all men should strive to be, and what we each at some time, hope to be.

Fearless he trod the path of life, and with a sincerity without disguise and singleness of purpose he discharged the task at hand. The instruments he used for the accomplishment of his purpose were entire devotion to the cause, transparent honesty, unflagging energy, and a fidelity beyond purchase or price. He recognized no criterion save that of the welfare and interests of America and mankind, he set no limits to his ceaseless endeavors to advance and serve such except the limits imposed by straight dealing, honor and truth; with truth, simple truth, the heart's own country music ever on the lips, and the love of righteous justice in his heart, he went into the arena the self-consecrated champion of the people to fight the people's cause, and so the people came to believe in him, to follow him and fold him to their hearts with a devotion defeat could not lessen and time will not tame.

No official etiquette, no cloistered seclusion, separated him from his kind; no pride of official station, no false sense of personal greatness, no belief in the inerrancy or infallibility of his private opinion or individual judgment prevented contact and counsel with his countrymen. He met in office, and out of office, all classes of his fellow citizens; the proscribed millionaire and the heads of labor; the great captains of industry; the leaders of the great political parties and the men in the ranks. He met and mingled with the men of the forest and the men of the plain; the men of the mine and the men of the loom; the men of the land and the men of the sea; the college

fellow and the common-school student; the leaders of advanced thought and the men in the street, he counseled and talked with each of them; he listened to each of them, shared in their joys, heard their tales of life, partook of their suffering, learned of their success and rejoiced in their triumphs, and made their lives a part of his own, and so came to know the great heart and understand the mind and purpose of America and so to read its conscience, to gauge its aspirations, to grasp its springs of holiest inspiration and noblest endeavor. And thus it was that when he spoke, his voice became, was the voice of America, America incarnate and articulate, and you and I, and all of us, found that he but uttered the thought, the aspirations and desires that we long had unawares entertained and but needed the notes of his clarion voice to flower into speech and become a part of life's creed, this enabled him to translate our thought into speech and say the things we would fain have said, better, more directly and effectively than we, ourselves, could say them, and so made our voice the voice of America.

The passion of service, the courage to do and dare all things in the cause of truth and right, abhorrence of injustice and oppression, not ambition to rule, not lust of power, it seems to me, together with a patriotism that recognized no sacrifice as too great, were his dominating characteristics. He, himself, has told us that service was the great thing in life and made his own life an example of his precept, and held if the service was rendered, it was immaterial that in rendering it, the instrument was broken or consumed.

Love of power and desire to dominate and control

have been ascribed to him, but when we come to examine the basis on which such charge rests, it will be noted that he saw the need of the hour, saw the duty to be performed, saw the necessity to be up and doing, and seeing the things at hand to be done, he turned to the doing of them regardless that in the doing, there might be no reward save that which springs from the sense of duty well performed, of obligation met and discharged. This phase of his character, I think, can best be presented in his own words:

“The leader for the time being, whoever he may be, is but an instrument to be used until broken and then to be cast aside; and if he is worth his salt he will care no more when he is broken than a soldier cares when he is sent where his life is forfeit in order that the victory may be won. In the long fight for righteousness the watch-word for us all is spend and be spent. It is of little matter whether any one man fails or succeeds, but the cause shall not fail, for it is the cause of mankind. We, here in America, hold in our hands the hope of the world, the fate of the coming years; shame and disgrace will be ours if in our eyes the light of high resolve is dimmed, if we trail in the dust the golden hopes of man.”

ROOSEVELT was an idealist but his idealism was that of the practical and farsighted man of affairs who transmutes inspiration into action; the idealism that sought to correct the evils of today, to redress the wrongs of today; the idealism that sought to qualify man worthily to fulfil the duties of that station in life to which it had pleased Almighty God to call him. If he could accomplish, or assist in accomplishing this he was content to leave the coming of that golden millennium which seers have prophesied, of which sages dream and poets sing, to the dreamer

of dreams, and the slow processes of time, and to be the doer of things; but in no cause in which the rights of man were the stakes; in no battle wherein enthroned evil challenged the righteousness of the world to its overthrow was he ever too proud or too weary to fight, and no sacrifice was too great to achieve the victory, for he knew the pathway of the cross was the pathway of civic and individual regeneration; that sacrifice must ever be the crown of consecration; that by some immutable law of fate, some inscrutable decree of a wise Providence, the pathway of the world's progress is ever crimsoned with the blood and strewn with the bones of men; that only from the sacrifice and broken hearts of today could spring the white flower of the blameless and perfect life of the morrow; that the diadem of the realized hopes of man is Calvary's crown of thorns.

ROOSEVELT, like all the divinely gifted men that have mastered man, was an optimist, but his optimism was of the sound and sane character that never loses sight of the fundamental facts of nature, that was never oblivious to the great moral laws regulating all existence; he was an optimist, but his optimism had the wisdom to face the fact that the mailed and clenched fist of a just wrath rightly applied was a more potent instrument than the sorcery of words—a more powerful agent than mystic idealism, though couched in all the magical beauty of a perfect scholastic phraseology, for the eradication and removal of abuses and oppression that corrode and darken life and rob existence of joy; he was an optimist who had faith in the efficacy of repentance, the virtue of forgiveness, the wisdom of charity, but his optimism was mellowed by the

sanity that holds repentance must be followed by contrition and restitution before we award forgiveness; that transgression must bear its burden of punishment and make reparation before it is entitled to demand or to receive absolution, and must rise on its dead self to higher levels before we should drape its hideous countenance with the mantle of an all-concealing charity; he was an optimist but one whose clear vision realized that perseverance and ceaseless effort were the golden keys to the gaol of the future and the release of the imprisoned aspirations of mankind; he was an optimist who believed in the eventual triumph of right but, his optimism, recognized the stubborn fact that in order to secure that triumph we must manfully do our part and trust in God with the certainty that He would perform His; an optimist whose lexicon contained no such word as failure or defeat in the fight for a just cause, and whose prescience foresaw that such fight once begun is never lost, that though baffled oft is ever won, won as surely as the sun blazes his track of glory athwart the skies; an optimist who believed in the final perfection of man but acknowledged, the subtle truth that in the economy of the natural as in that of the celestial world, perfection claims its purchase price and that the agony of crucifixion must precede the splendor of transfiguration.

No American has given, no American can give a greater sacrifice in greater measure to the cause he loved and to the cause of righteousness than ROOSEVELT. When denied the privilege of purchasing American safety with his own blood, like the Spartan of old he girded up his sons and sent them forth to battle, to shed their blood

and to die for the country that refused the sacrament of his own, and when his hero son fell, with great simplicity he left his ashes to repose undisturbed in the fair fields of that land his death helped to liberate, and with a greatness, truly American, denied a claim to greater consideration than that due the humble thousands who made a like sacrifice and mingled his sorrow with the holy pride that his son, and that son's father and mother had been willing to make the last great sacrifice in order that America might live and righteousness be triumphant throughout the world.

Knowing these things, is it a wonder that Americans have loved this man as they have loved no other?

His services to the country were of the heart and not of the lips, were of the deed and not of the promise. With him, pitiless publicity became an actuality, an avenging nemesis with which he drove faithless officials and corrupt public servants from the capitol, and service of the country, as Christ of old scourged the money lenders and the thieves from the Temple of the Living God.

A courage, without fear, was his. A courage that saw only the end to be attained and the way and means by which that end was to be attained, and he trod that way and wrought to achieve that end without regard of self, without hesitating to consider what the results to him might be. And so, when the relentless and savage hordes of William the Assassin plundered violated Belgium and devastated devoted France and boldly proclaimed the iniquitous doctrine that treaties were scraps of paper and flaunted in the face of Heaven the Christless creed that might makes right, the courageous heart of ROOSEVELT

knew no neutrality of thought; knew no neutrality of word; knew no neutrality of action, save that imposed by official sanction.

When nations truckled to and fawned upon the German Moloch, red as Herod with the blood of slaughtered innocents; when Cabinets used the language of supplicatory expostulation in vain attempts to propitiate the bestial Teuton war-god; when Senators met German propagandists in secret midnight conclave to barter American rights for hyphenated votes; when college presidents and professors prated of German power, superiority and efficiency and became the ready and subservient instruments of imperialistic propaganda; when servile politicians quailed in submission before the might of an organized foreign vote; when America, wrapt in the pursuit of gain, seemed unable to find her conscience; when it appeared that the Hun agents, pacifists, and the Huns within our gates might succeed in stifling the true voice of America until the armed foot of the invader was on our own soil, and civilization should be overthrown in Europe, his lone voice, like the wild clamor of a fire bell in the night, rang out, continued to ring out until it alarmed our fears, continued to ring out until it caused action.

The prophetic soul of ROOSEVELT realized from the first that the battle lines in Europe were the first trenches of the American defense, and through all the clamor of official and unofficial detraction, through all the derision of pacifists, through all the fierce misrepresentations of Hun and shirkers, through all the false imputations of personal and revengeful purposes, in face of official denial of its statements, that voice still rang out louder and

more insistent and refused to be stilled until it found and pierced the heart and fired the conscience of America, for the voice was the voice of ROOSEVELT and he knew that at length America would recognize it as her own and rouse to action. A braver deed, a sublimer feat, the annals of the world do not disclose.

These are a few and but a few of the things that have won for this remarkable and truly great man a more than Eastern devotion, and explain why the four corners of the earth have come together to do him honor.

But he has passed from us.

In the noon-day luster of a just renown; in the full fruition of his fame; in the full maturity of all his faculties and before one had felt "decay's effacing fingers"; before his powers passed meridian splendor; greeted with enthusiasm; followed by affection; crowned with a people's love; dowered with a people's confidence—the great American died; died as he had lived; died as he wished to die—with the harness on—and left his deathless fame the richest legacy of his age to time. Let us mourn for him, but proudly mourn, as we bestow on eternity a Jewel "richer than all our tribe."

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